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Despite record ridership, mass transit systems across America are in crisis. When the cost of gas spiked last summer, ridership soared and high volumes have continued ever since. But the weak economy is causing huge shortfalls in state and local revenues. Transit agencies are facing the budget ax just when their services are in highest demand.

In cities and regions across the country, mass transit agencies are being forced to not only cut jobs, but eliminate the services so many commuters need to get to their jobs. Employee and service cuts can easily translate into a corresponding number of commuters who can't get to work.

St. Louis's Metro just laid off 550 employees and plans to eliminate a significant portion of its bus service. Cleveland's RTA plans to cut 300 jobs. WMATA in Washington, DC is considering \$13.5 million in service cuts. And in California, literally thousands of workers are at risk of being laid off and massive service cuts are imminent.

The recently passed stimulus legislation didn't solve this problem. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act included funds for transit capital projects, but not for operating assistance. Unfortunately, new buses aren't going to expand capacity if there are no employees to drive them.

We fought for a provision in the Senate's FY09 Supplemental Appropriations Act includes that would allow transit agencies to use up to 10 percent of their stimulus funds for operational expenses. Giving transit agencies this flexibility will help address widespread budgetary shortfalls – without any additional cost to the American taxpayer.

When the House and Senate meet this week to finalize the Supplemental Appropriations bill, Congress will decide what remains in the bill – and if public transportation systems can use some of their stimulus funds for operating assistance. This legislative remedy will avoid or minimize service cuts and save thousands of good paying transit jobs – while helping those who rely on mass transit to get to work.